

POSITIVE EUGENICS IN PRACTICE

An Account of the First Positive Eugenic Experiment

By ALFRED DACHERT

(The writer, who is Vice-Président-Gérant of Les Jardins Ungemach of Strasburg, is both the originator and effective director of a unique attempt to breed a better race. His garden city is devoted to encouraging large families from young parents who have been personally selected for health and other personal qualities. The article has been freely but, we hope, accurately translated from the original French.—ED.)

HAVING been asked to give an account of the eugenic aspects of the city, Les Jardins Ungemach, which it is my privilege to serve, I will tell the history of the venture, and will leave my readers to pick out for themselves those aspects which are especially significant to them.

My first encounter with eugenics was, I believe, when, as quite a young man, I read Darwin's *Origin of Species*, in which the eugenic doctrine, though never explicitly stated, is throughout implicit. At that moment, I think, the conviction took root in me that the human species was capable of improvement, and that only man's good will was required to raise the race to a new and higher level. The idea had an immense attraction for me and, realizing its poetical and mystic charm, I found these great hopes magnificently expressed in Renan's *Dialogues Philosophiques*. It was the time, too, when Ruffenach was writing his *Gazon Prévost* and his *Val l'Evêque*.

It is not without reason that I thus stress the effect of eugenics upon the imagination, for if the general public some day takes an interest in this group of sciences, it will be owing to its religious and emotional attraction. There is a profound truth in the lines of the German poet: "It was Icarus who led the Wright brothers towards the sun; and to the unwieldy chariots of humanity an invisible Pegasus is yoked."

Later I learned that in England an exact science of eugenics was taught, and a Chair for it founded. I knew the names of the

distinguished leaders in this science and I made myself familiar with their writings.

Among the many criticisms which disturb this new science there is one which constantly crops up, and which declares that eugenics must be opposed to charity. But, as I understood, the day is now passed of indiscriminate 'cash down' charity, and we are entering upon an era of a charity which takes longer views. And what else is eugenics if it be not just that far-sighted charity?

At this time, when the first garden cities were just being built, I took the opportunity to visit Port Sunlight, and I read a description of Bournville.

THE BIRTH OF AN IDEAL

It must have been about 1902 that I began to dream of creating a city which would enable its families to live under the pleasantest conditions; but I was then only a very young and modest manager of a small sweetmeat factory, and I had not the least hope of ever seeing my dream come true. This dream city I called "Mount Hymettus," since it was to be an offshoot of the confectionery business; but that was all I hoped to achieve.

Towards 1910 the first garden city, "Stockfeld," was built in Strasburg, and in watching it grow, I came to the conclusion that this marvellous instrument did not assist, as it should, the progress of the human species. Dwelling there I saw old maiden ladies, widows, and sundry others who had been chosen by the purest chance.

As time passed, the business I managed grew; it employed over 500 persons, and became a powerful instrument by means of which important social changes might some day be achieved. But, curiously enough, it was the War which brought about the realization of my schemes. The German legislation as to the distribution, sale, and purchase of sugar-stuffs had the extraordinary effect of increasing our profits by 2,400,000 gold marks. It did not seem to me possible to pocket this money, and I suggested to my company that we should transfer it to a special account, and administer it separately with the object of furthering some social work. My attitude was completely understood by my chief, the revered M. Ungemach, who had created the Société alsacienne d'Alimentation (the proprietary company of the factory I managed) and in whose honour the city I was to build was named Les Jardins Ungemach. He supported me valiantly and undertook to persuade our directorate to adopt my views.

But to what social cause should we devote these funds?

At this juncture my old schemes, matured in my mind by the passage of years, came to life; and I proposed that we should devote the money to building a eugenic city. A low birth rate being the curse of our country, my suggestion was approved. Soon after I decided to retire from business in order to devote myself body and soul to the making of such a city.

FERTILITY—AND ANCESTOR-WORSHIP

From that time I prepared myself seriously for the task which awaited me. I got up all the literature on the subject, visited all the garden cities which had been built in England and France, and attended the Inter-Allied Housing and Town-Planning Congress in London in 1920. But when I wanted to get down to work I was met with two great difficulties. First, our funds, which had been invested in foreign securities, had been sequestered; and next, there was not at that time any contractor who was able to enter into a definite con-

tract as to price. Having left business and not being able to devote myself to my new work, I decided to go on tour and to acquire all the knowledge I should need to get satisfactory results. My readers may perhaps be surprised to learn that, with this object in view, I went to China. Ancestor-worship has considerable influence on child-bearing and natural selection, and I wished to study for myself the effect of this religion on its followers. I spent nearly a year in China, studying these problems, and concluded that ancestor-worship is, so to say, the Old Testament which precedes the New Testament of Evolution. It is not difficult to conceive that a time will come when eugenic convictions based on a sound science will have considerable influence on the modern life of old-world Europe.

A CHINESE GARDEN CITY

Quite by accident during my travels I visited the garden city which is the oldest in the world and which still remains the model for all the rest, the Manchu town of Peking; and I also saw another garden city which is probably the most remarkable of our time, New Batavia in Java. In passing through Tokio, I was struck at discovering in the Maruzen library a whole shelf-full of books on eugenics, a discovery which taught me that a country prepared by ancestor-worship is particularly favourable soil for the eugenic seed. At home, in France, one might search a hundred libraries without finding a single book on the subject. I was also happy enough to come upon an excellent synopsis of the subject, *Applied Eugenics*, by Popenoe and Johnson, which I read on my journey from Yokohama to Manilla.

When I returned to Strasburg in the spring of 1921, all the obstacles which had stood in the way of our city had disappeared; and the town of Strasburg, realizing the significance of our work, put at our disposal the ancient glacis (it was a fortress once) of Wacken, which had the double advantage of being near to the town and of being planted with old trees. Very soon I

started the building of 200 houses, 140 of which are now finished.

THE PRINCIPLES OF SELECTION

My ideas of the principles which ought to guide us in developing the Jardins Ungemach had matured during my journeys, and I decided that to make the city a means for perfecting the human race, I should have to lay down two rules :

1. The inhabitants should be selected, not from the point of view of their constituting good-paying tenants, but for their human qualities

2. The laying-out and regulation of the city and its houses should be such as to promote the best development of the families inhabiting it.

Our object should therefore be not to provide houses for those families which happened to want them, but to help young couples towards self-development. We should not shelter large families, but create them. And it was essential thus to encourage not only large families, but also those whose mentality and physique would be a real acquisition to the country.

But how were we to go about choosing such tenants?

We must find young couples, in the best of health, comely and vigorous, and who really wanted children. Consequently, I established a system of selection by four stages :

The candidate begins by filling up a form which contains a series of questions about his age and state of health. Marks are given according to the answers, and the applications are classified according to the total marks obtained. I myself then interview the families obtaining the highest marks. Next, I get to know them and amplify their previous replies, and thereafter a committee visits them at home, in order to see them in their normal surroundings and to find out their mode of life and the tidiness and decency of their homes. When the choice has been finally made, we ask for a medical certificate from both husband and wife, so that we may have the fullest assurance of their soundness.

HOUSES PLANNED FOR CHILDREN

The young couples thus selected are placed in surroundings which are particularly suitable to their mental and physical development. The city, which is in easy reach of the town, is built in an airy, healthy, and quiet place without any shops or public-houses. Each house is detached, and is so planned as to avoid all unnecessary labour for a young housewife who is expected to have children, but cannot afford the help of a servant.

1. All rooms are on one floor.
2. There is a big kitchen-dining-room.
3. A laundry, which is also a bathroom, adjoins the kitchen-dining-room, so that the housewife, without running about, can attend at the same time to her children, the cooking, and the washing.
4. Water laid on in all bedrooms, to obviate the need for carrying slops.
5. There are regular deliveries of milk, bread, groceries, and meat, so that the housewife need not go shopping.
6. By the same token, the city has a day nursery, where the babies and young children can be left. This also enables the city's doctor to watch every child from its infancy and to warn the parents at the first disquieting symptom.

Sometimes it happens, though rarely, that the families thus favoured do not grow. The Foundation then replaces them with others who are more promising, for the city, being made for children, must not be allowed to be occupied by families which cannot or will not have any.

Since the birth of the city, seven years ago, we have only had to take action nine times. This is the way to deal with the mischief often referred to in eugenic literature, that families with small means cease to be fertile when transferred to better surroundings.

And what have been the results during the seven years our city has existed? The following figures will give some idea of the differences between town and city.

THE RESULTS AFTER SEVEN YEARS

Year.		Number of Houses.	Number of Inhabitants.	Persons per House.
1927	...	123	505	4.10
1928	...	132	569	4.31
1929	...	132	592	4.48

BIRTHS PER 1,000 LIVING.

Year.		Town of Strasburg.	Les Jardins.
1927	...	16.35	39.69
1928	...	16.80	35.15
1929	...	15.80	37.16

DEATHS PER 1,000 LIVING.

Year.		Town of Strasburg.	Les Jardins.
1927	...	11.72	5.94
1928	...	11.90	1.77
1929	...	13.01	1.68

**EXCESS OF BIRTHS OVER DEATHS,
PER 1,000 LIVING.**

Year.		Town of Strasburg.	Les Jardins.
1927	...	4.6	35.6
1928	...	4.9	33.4
1929	...	2.7	35.6

It is true that these figures are not strictly comparable, but they give an approximate idea of the differences.

They suggest, in particular, that young couples, placed in our surroundings, do not shrink from having children to the same extent that they do when living in a densely populated urban district. This is all the more striking since our citizens belong to just that class which is deemed the most infertile, the small clerk and small official class.

The figures also show that the sanitation of the city is good. Indeed, we have had no epidemics, and signs of tuberculosis in the children have been few and slight.

As for the behaviour of the citizens, we find that drunkenness is completely unknown in the Jardins Ungemach, and that the police have never been called in since the city's birth. There has only been one quarrel between neighbours.

There has been a steady improvement in

the cleanness and tidiness of the houses. The committee which visits the young couples before they are admitted to the city, gives marks, running from 1 to 10, to each for tidiness and cleanness. Each year the same committee visits all of the houses in the city and gives marks, in the same way, for the state of the interior of each house. In comparing these marks with those obtained before entry, we find a rise, on the average, of 1.3. In professional success there has been equal progress. Husbands, freed from the usual worries about the housing of their families and living in healthy and quiet surroundings, are in a state to bring to their toil a lighter heart which makes them better workers. During the seven years of the city's existence only once has a rent been unpaid, and we notice many signs of increased well-being in almost every family. Families often leave us to remove to better class dwellings or to build their own houses.

It is also clear that the city has not only a social but a moral influence on its inhabitants, though this is less easy to prove.

—AND LOOKING FORWARDS?

Can it be said, after this account of the results of our work, that they have justified the efforts made? The question is important, because in 1950 the Jardins Ungemach will no longer be administered as a separate estate, but will belong to the town of Strasburg. If during this time of experiment the results achieved are plainly better than those obtained in other cities, the town will continue along the road we have opened. If not, it will not trouble to follow in our steps, and our work will have been in vain.

The field of experience which we have been tilling is not ours alone: it belongs to the whole eugenic world. It is to the interest of all the disciples of eugenics to support us. Up to the present, our results have been satisfactory; but if experts have any advice or suggestions to make, we should gratefully welcome and apply them to the reinforcement of our own experiment.